New Fiction

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seems to her "the most ravishing, lovely, tender thing that ever happened to any girl." He is marvelous, and she decides to be as marvelous as he. "Chiefly, she was grateful. And what she saw in front of her was a sublime vocation." And here Mr. Bennett adds, with a delightful touch of satire, "her mood was ever so faintly tinged with regret because they were not both in evening dress."

As already hinted, this is a familiar, almost hackneyed plot up to a certain point: the ofttold story of the unprotected girl led astray by her employer, and the tragedy hastened by the futile interference of a female relative. Mr. Bennett, however, gives this old material several refreshingly new twists. In the first place this reprehensible couple are both quite sincere in their mutual admiration and gratitude. They experience no disillusion; they are as happy as two children on a holiday. The whole brief history of their sojourn together on the Riviera, which might so easily been made sordid and hectic, is pictured with such rare sympathy that it leaves, on the contrary, the impression of an evanescent and charming idyll. Then, without warning, tragedy intrudes ruthlessly. Felix at fifty should have taken better care of himself; night air on the Riviera is treacherous. He makes a gallant but losing fight against pneumonia; and having learned that Lilian faces what Mr. Kipling has defined as the Almost Inevitable Consequences, he has barely time to assure her welfare and that of the child by a belated marriage.

From the point of view of narrow old-fashioned morality the whole story, of course, is topsy-turvy. Miss Grig, the diligent, toiling Ant of the old fable, is disinherited, and Lilian, the careless, merry-making Grasshopper of a brief season, reaps the harvest. And yet one feels, somehow, that it is all perfectly right; that in coming into her own Lilian has merely triumphed over some of the initial injustice of her luckless birth and training. And a good many of us are just unrighteous enough to share her satisfaction in her unspoken thought during her final hostile parting with Miss Grig:

"One day you will come and swallow your pride and beg me humbly for a sight of his child!"

FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

THE KEY OF DREAMS. By L. Adams Beck. Dodd, Mead & Co.

WHEN the Englishman of fiction wanders into Japan in search of soul adventures the result is apt to be either of the type with which opera has made us familiar, or a cloudy fantasia, usually reminiscent—a long way off—of Lafcadio Hearn. Mr. Beck has combined the two things with noteworthy success, and has given body and reality to his partially Orientalized hero. If modern Buddhism, and its hope of becoming a world religion, do not mix very congruously with Madame Chrysanteme and the British divorce court, Mr. Beck nevertheless compels them to play together without quite ruining one another. Possibly he attains this plausible result largely by the use of what Don Marquis has labeled the "Compromise Ending" of the play; he lets his hero eat his cake and have it too. Dunbar finishes the story as an aspiring Buddhist, a Seeker, groping for the Path, and so on, but he is also comfortably married to the English lady of his dream and they have settled down, in a Chinese temple near Pekin, prepared to live happily ever after. There is originality, at least, in the conception.

Moreover, Mr. Beck is a deft handler of words. His richly embroidered description satisfies, although he is sometimes in danger of extravagance in the spending of his adjectives. But such phrases as "the elf-fingered industry of the craftsmen" of the Japanese hills stay with one. The book is a striking example of success in the modern florid style. Mr. Beck is always the careful, conscientious workman, with nothing haphazard in his product. And his narrative is fluent.

The hero is a war shattered, disillusioned young man, who has fallen heir, in more than one sense, to the belongings of a defunct cousin, whose name was also Lancelot Dunbar. Fleeing from himself he goes to Japan, taking with him his cousin's book, and, apparently in some mysterious fashion his cousin's personality. He meets the adorable Miyuki, former mistress of the aforesaid cousin, and acquires her too. They get on fairly well for a time, although Dunbar is also distracted by his study of Buddhism. But then the other woman appears, Lady Lucia, who is unhappily married to a rich "bounder" named Sellenger. Of course Dunbar and Lucia are instant affinities. In due time a change of partners is brought about, the lady gets a divorce and the pair vanish into connubial bliss in the remote background of China. Incidentally, poor little Miyuki is abandoned by the brutal Sellenger.

Mr. Beck is much in earnest in his presentation of Buddhism: more than half the book deals with it, although it is nicely woven into the plot. If the picture is more "intriguing" or fascinating than convincing, that may be due to the tough minded Occidental reader who always finds it hard to take his mysticism very strenuously. But, however one feels about that, it is an unusually interesting book.

GEORGE WOOD.

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE. By Oliver Herford. George H. Doran Company.

MAYBE "Say It With Astericks" is the best paper in Oliver Herford's book. It isn't easy, to be sure. It happens to be the last one I read, and for the moment it is the best, because I remember it most clearly. But presently I am going to read some others, some even of those I have already read over again. And then I may be convinced that "The Ruthlessness of Mr. Cobb," with its neat stroke for honor and self-sacrifice as against expediency, is the best, or possibly my vote would go for "The Hobgoblin," where some of our best selling authors get a smart rap, and which ends with a fascinating parody of "Where Are You Going, My Pretty Maid?" But to come back to the first choice, the last skit in the book.

This article has particular reference to one Edward J. O'Brien and his 1921 volume of the Best Short Stories. It will give the keenest delight to a great many people, among whom Mr. O'Brien will not be numbered. All the host who object to Classification, to Orders of Merit, to Smugness, to Pronouncements, to Averages and Percentages as applied to art, will give out loud huzzas and break into peals of shocking laughter as they read this wise and restrained comment; and when Mr. Herford catches Mr. O'Brien in a phrase like the following: "Three astericks prefixed to a title indicate *the more or less permanent* literary value of the story," and remarks: "'More or less permanent' reminds me of an advertisement I once saw in a street car: 'Face powder makes your complexion *more irresistible.*' Is it possible that Mr. O'Brien wrote it?" they will laugh some more. Especially as they continue from that point and perceive what other indignities this man O'Brien committed upon "permanent" before he dropped the exhausted word, and before Herford drops

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